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REVIEWS.

The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris. Edited by ANNE CARY MORRIS. New York, Scribner's Sons, 1888.—Two vols. 8vo, 604, 630 pp.

The marked revival of interest in American history is bringing before the public many treasures, the existence of which in manuscript has long been known, but which have been jealously guarded by family pride or individual selfishness. To this class of publications these volumes of Morris belong ; but rather in the group of *mémoires* than in that of serious historical records. Morris was prominent in the provincial politics of New York ; he was active in the first years of the American revolution, and later served under Robert Morris as an executive officer of the Continental Congress. After the peace he went to France on commercial and financial business, still connected with Robert Morris ; received a diplomatic appointment ; was in France as American minister during the bloodiest years of the French revolution, and afterwards returned to America to again take part in its political concerns. This was a life of varied experience that to an observant and clever man would furnish an interesting story : and Morris was a man of considerable culture ; a charming and fluent writer ; fond of society and studious of social forms and elegances ; able to turn a pretty phrase, compliment or verse when called for ; a master of French ; and as outspoken and frankly honest as the writer of a *mémoire* could well be. The result is two very readable volumes of diaries and letters, containing perhaps a little too much of the man (for his personal characteristics were very strong and seldom concealed) and too little of what would be of value in determining his position in the events of the time.

The strictly personal nature of the record explains its shortcomings. In France Morris reflected the passing gossip of the day, and chiefly the gossip of the *salon*, which Taine shows to have been so superficial and ignorant ; his habits of thought were such that he could not penetrate beneath the surface indications and recognize any connection between the American and the French movements, any great underlying social forces that were working to similar ends. Hence his explanations of what had occurred, and his conjectures of the future, are more curious than valuable ; and at times he recognizes this himself : " At present I weary myself with unavailing reflection, meditation, and conjecture."

But it is of interest to see through American eyes the events of the great drama that was then enacting and the leading performers; and the reader is brought into closer relations with a certain part of French society in a manner that cannot be otherwise than agreeable, for the narrative is well sustained, piquant at times, and marked by not a few happy descriptions of character.

Passing over his French experiences and his travels on the continent of Europe, pleasantly told but of little novelty, we come to his return to America. Here a sense of disappointment is felt. Morris was a Federalist (though now by no means the ardent advocate that he was in the earlier years of the Revolution), and all his political affiliations were with that party. His intimacy with its leaders (and few states could claim so much ability or show so many fiercely contested political battles as New York) gave him an opportunity of knowing their purposes and the means used to accomplish their ends. Yet how meagrely he used his opportunities may be seen by turning to the letters covering the Burr-Jefferson contest, and the episode of Hamilton's death. No idea is gained from his records of the rapid downfall of the Federalists, nor of the rise of the Democrat or Jefferson party. That this omission could not have arisen from indifference is shown by his severe strictures on the Democratic leaders, and notably on Jefferson: "He is Utopia, quite," believing in the "perfectibility of man, the wisdom of mobs, and moderation of Jacobins"; he had "outlived his popularity, and is descending to a condition which I find no decent word to designate"; his folly was the "great evil under which America groans," and his policy was forcing the country into the path that led to monarchy, "which has ever been the termination of mob government"; while his party thrived by "sacrificing permanent public interest to a fleeting popularity." Democracy represented to Morris "no government at all, but, in fact, the death or dissolution of other systems." It is not a little curious that the Federalists, counting among their ranks the intelligence and wealth of the country, were so blind to the large element of truth that gave such force to Jefferson's belief in the power of the people. If so masterly a mind as Hamilton's was befogged by aristocratic ideas of government, we can hardly look to Morris, an even greater believer in an aristocracy than was Hamilton, for a clearer perception of the drift of political power. He "abuses the other party," but there is no sentence in his writings, politician that he was, that discloses the most remote idea of the real fault of the Federalists, or of the expediency of appealing to the people, which Jefferson did in such a manner as to win for himself the name of demagogue.

During the contest between Burr and Jefferson, Morris indicated a preference for the former. Burr's defects, he thought, did not arise from

a want of energy and vigor ; he was courageous, might be generous, and could not be charged with ingratitude. Jefferson was infected with all the " cold-blooded vices," and what was of greater moment to a Northern man, he was regarded as a " slave of Virginia "—the state jealousies, engendered during the Revolution, not having subsided. A few years later, Morris concluded that Burr had little chance to be a leader of any party, though he had " considerable talents for government." There is not a word, however, to properly characterize the curious misapplication of political force that led the Federalists to attempt to place such a man as Burr in the presidential chair, although Morris believed them to be " moved by passion only," and agreed with Hamilton that Burr should not owe his election to Federalist votes. Morris's characterization of his friend and leader, Hamilton, (too long to be quoted here,) is very curious, and should be read by all interested in political history (II, 456, 474, 523). Gallatin is highly esteemed by Morris, who rightly describes him as " by much the strongest man " in Madison's cabinet.

We must insist that the personal interest of these volumes dominates the political or historical, and it is in recording social events that the writer appears at his best. This leads him to note bits of gossip that a deeper nature would have passed over as idle talk. A good example of this is his criticism on Madison's second inaugural :

When I read it, I supposed him to be out of his senses, and have since been told that he never goes sober to bed. Whether intoxicated by opium or wine was not said, but I learned last winter that pains in his teeth had driven him to use the former too freely.

His portrait of Lafayette is not a pleasing one, and appears overdrawn, while Paine is treated most contemptuously—as in a measure he richly deserved. But it is a pleasure to read of his social and travelling experiences, told with vivacity and in happy language, indicating a good-natured and not over-fastidious man of the world ; a character that did not recommend him to the sterner characters of the time—Richard Henry Lee, for example, speaking of him as a " mere flutterer on the surface." It is to be regretted that the more solid qualities of the man are not brought out more clearly, for a similar record of his experiences in the Provincial and Continental Congresses, and in the office of finance, would show him in a little different light. Still we are very thankful for this contribution, carefully and intelligently edited by his grand-daughter ; and we are even more thankful to have Morris presented to us in a shape other than that of the stiff formality with which Sparks unfortunately clothed all his subjects.

WORTHINGTON C. FORD.